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AUTHOR Rosaen, Cheryl L.; Cantlon, Danise J.
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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to analyze and compare two elementary literature-based thematic curriculum units. A broad set of framing questions developed by a team of researchers representing six subject areas was used with a particular focus on the extent to which the two units would likely promote understanding and appreciation of literature and the extent to which writing was used to enhance such understanding and appreciation. Each unit was examined for its coherence, which included appraisal of the theme's potential, how the theme was developed throughout the unit to enhance and support literary understanding and appreciation, the kind of knowledge promoted, and the ways in which activities and writing assignments were complementary. Results showed that: (1) because the "Survival Tales" focus unit discussions and writing activities, it fosters a deeper understanding of the literature than does the "On the Edge" basal unit whose theme is not developed as coherently; and (2) the "Survival Tales" focus unit structure provides multiple opportunities for interaction using the four language modes in authentic reading and writing tasks, giving students a chance to make personal, social, and academic/metacognitive connections. Results indicated that teachers need to choose resources for literature-based units well and consider seriously the power of the theme for developing literary understanding and appreciation. (PRA)

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COHERENCE IN LITERATURE-BASED THEMATIC UNITS

Cheryl L. Rosaen and Danise J. Cantlon

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The work is designed to unfold in three phases, beginning with literature review and interview studies designed to elicit and synthesize the points of view of various stakeholders (representatives of the underlying academic disciplines, intellectual leaders and organizations concerned with curriculum and instruction in school subjects, classroom teachers, state- and district-level policymakers) concerning ideal curriculum, instruction, and evaluation practices in these five content areas at the elementary level. Phase II involves interview and observation methods designed to describe current practice, and in particular, best practice as observed in the classrooms of teachers believed to be outstanding. Phase II also involves analysis of curricula (both widely used curriculum series and distinctive curricula developed with special emphasis on conceptual understanding and higher order applications), as another approach to gathering information about current practices. In Phase III, models of ideal practice will be developed, based on what has been learned and synthesized from the first two phases, and will be tested through classroom intervention studies.

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Co-directors:	Jere E. Brophy and Penelope L. Peterson
Senior Researchers:	Patricia Cianciolo, Sandra Hollingsworth, Wanda May, Richard Prawat, Ralph Putnam, Taffy Raphael, Cheryl Rosaen, Kathleen Roth, Pamela Schram, Suzanne Wilson
Editor:	Sandra Gross
Editorial Assistant:	Tom Bowden

Abstract

Phase II of the research on teaching for understanding and knowledge use in the elementary subjects, undertaken by the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects, includes description and analysis of commonly used and distinctive published curriculum materials in each of six subject matter areas: literature, science, mathematics, social studies, music, and the visual arts. This paper reports findings from an analysis and comparison of two elementary literature-based thematic curriculum units. A broad set of framing questions developed by a team of researchers representing the six subject areas was used, with a particular focus on the extent to which the two units would likely promote understanding and appreciation of literature and the extent to which writing is used to enhance such understanding and appreciation. Each unit was examined for its coherence, which included appraisal of the theme's potential, how the theme is developed throughout the unit to enhance and support literary understanding and appreciation, the kind of knowledge promoted, and the ways in which activities and writing assignments are complementary. The appraisal of the two curriculum units is followed by a discussion of the use of one of the units in a third/fourth-grade classroom and recommendations for teachers to consider when choosing literature-based thematic curriculum materials.

COHERENCE IN LITERATURE-BASED THEMATIC UNITS

Cheryl L. Rosaen and Danise J. Cantlon[1]

The research reported in this paper was undertaken as part of the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subject's five-year research agenda. The Center's research focuses on the teaching and learning of mathematics, science, social studies, literature, music, and the visual arts in the elementary grades (K-6), with emphasis on teaching and learning for understanding and knowledge use in each content area. This paper reports on findings from an analysis and comparison of two elementary literature-based thematic curriculum units. Using a broad set of framing questions developed by a team of Center researchers representing the six subject areas (see Appendix), this analysis focused on the extent to which the units would likely promote understanding and appreciation of literature and the extent to which writing is used to enhance such understanding and appreciation. Each unit was examined for its coherence, which included appraisal of the following areas: the theme's potential, how the theme is developed throughout the unit to enhance and support literary understanding and appreciation, the kinds of knowledge promoted, and the ways in which activities and writing assignments are complementary. The description and analysis of the two units is followed by discussion of the use of one of the units in a third/fourth-grade classroom and by recommendations for teachers to consider when choosing literature-based thematic curriculum materials.

Coherence in Thematic Units

Literature-based instruction is a popular and appealing approach to teaching for several reasons. These units enable teachers to expose students to a wide variety of literary genres; they are a way to help students develop and improve reading

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[1]Cheryl L. Rosaen, assistant professor of teacher education at Michigan State University, is a senior researcher with the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects. Danise J. Cantlon, a former research assistant with the Center, is a second-grade teacher at Elliott Elementary School in Holt, Michigan.

comprehension and skills that draws on students' background and interests; and they provide links to other subject matter areas (Zingher, 1990). Helping students to develop aesthetic sensitivities to and understandings of literature is an important and worthwhile goal for literacy instruction (Cianciolo, 1991). One way to encourage thoughtful response to literature is to create coherent literature-based thematic units. Coherent units of study are (a) organized around a meaningful theme and are (b) focused on fostering connected understandings through knowledge construction and connected experiences. Coherence of this nature helps students to understand and appreciate literature and to go beyond merely using literature as a vehicle for other subject matter learning.

Curriculum materials are a valuable resource for teachers in planning and implementing their instruction. For some teachers, curriculum materials play a major role in defining the content and methods of their teaching, although for others they are one of many resources on which to draw (Ben-Peretz, 1990; Stodolsky, 1989). In this paper, we discuss two upper elementary curriculum units that claim to be literature-based thematic units. We studied the units' coherence to appraise their potential for helping students develop understanding and appreciation of the units' literature. We asked ourselves this question: If a teacher were going to develop and teach a coherent unit organized around a theme for the purpose of developing critical/aesthetic response to literature, which unit is a better resource and why? We centered our appraisal of the two units around the following questions[2]:

> What is the theme's potential? To what extent is the theme developed and used to enhance and support developing literary understanding and appreciation?

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[2]We began our initial appraisal of the two curriculum units by using the framing questions developed by the research team (see Appendix and Cantlon & Rosaen, 1990), and then developed these specific questions to focus our analysis more closely on the potential of the thematic grouping of literary selections in each unit. It was our intent that the questions we developed for analysis of these two particular units still encompass many of the ideas included in each section of the framing questions.

> Is the theme used effectively throughout the unit to foster **connected understandings** of three types of knowledge--personal, social, and academic/metacognitive--through **connected experiences** that will promote literary understanding and appreciation?

Our discussion is organized into five sections. First, we define what we consider to be important curricular goals and make explicit our underlying assumptions regarding the kinds of understandings and appreciation that coherent units should foster. Second, we describe briefly the two units, giving an overview of their organization and how the theme of survival is developed. In the third section, we define more fully what we mean by meaningful theme and connected understandings through connected experiences, and use these criteria to compare and appraise the two units. In the fourth section, the second author reflects on the use of one of the units in her third/fourth-grade classroom, showing ways in which the unit's coherence helped students construct understandings of the survival theme and connect it to their understanding and appreciation of the literature they read. In the final section, we discuss implications for selecting and using resources for literature-based thematic units.

Curriculum Goals for Literature-Based Thematic Units

We argue for promoting understanding and appreciation of literature as a prominent goal when literature-based thematic units are used in language arts instruction. To promote <u>understanding</u> of literature students need opportunities to connect bits and pieces of knowledge in meaningful ways. For example, students use three kinds of knowledge interactively--personal, social, and academic/meta-cognitive--to understand literature (Probst, 1991). Unless knowledge is meaningfully connected, seeing how it can be used to understand literature may not result. Ideas need to be made explicit, and students need help in seeing connections between ideas. This results in modified schema. Coherent units are sets of experiences that help students develop new knowledge and connect it to prior knowledge. Students link

personal, social, and academic/metacognitive knowledge in meaningful ways to develop rich and solid understandings that are accessible (Prawat, 1988 and 1990). When ideas are accessible, students can draw appropriately on their knowledge base to respond to and make sense of literature, thus developing strategic (metacognitive) knowledge (Anderson, 1989) that enables them to know when to use particular kinds of knowledge for sense making. Coherence supports students in this knowledge construction. Consequently, literature-based thematic units should organize unit content and experiences coherently, or in ways that promote literary understanding.

To promote appreciation of literature, students need opportunities to bring both cognitive and affective aspects of response to literature together to examine preferences, feelings, and thoughts in relation to text and to appraise ways in which the text elicited a particular response. The essence of appreciation is constructing critical and aesthetic responses to literature. This requires the ability to organize prior knowledge and experience (personal, social, and academic/metacognitive), bring it to the text, and interpret it for personal meaning and to evaluate text as literary art (Cianciolo, 1991). Coherent units, therefore, should help students make connections between cognitive and affective responses and understand the connections to more deeply appreciate their transaction with literature (Rosenblatt, 1985).

Two Literature-Based Units on the Theme of Survival

Both curriculum units clustered the reading and discussion of book selections around the theme of survival. In this section, we provide a brief overview of how each unit focused on survival as a theme, and how the learning experiences in each unit were organized.

Survival as Being on the Edge of Danger

One unit we examined was Unit Three in Reading Today and Tomorrow, a fifth-grade basal reader published by Holt, Rinehart, and Winston (1989). It was entitled

"On the Edge." While this unit is part of a basal reading series that is intended primarily to improve students' reading skills and comprehension, the series also claims to promote literary appreciation and understanding as a major goal. The authors chose a variety of reading selections that centered around the theme of people being on the edge of danger as a form of adventure, with three subsections (people facing natural disaster, people using their wits in the face of danger, and time travel). The survival theme is used to provide a topical connection among the selections.

The typical lesson structure in the "On the Edge" unit is divided into three sections: (a) preparing for the selection, (b) reading for comprehension, and (c) developing reading and thinking skills. There is an optional section titled "Reteaching and Extending," which provides additional opportunities to meet students' individual needs. Students read excerpts from actual literature or adapted versions. The skills and strategies in these sections focus primarily on developing comprehension skills and are taught in relative isolation from one another with little or no reference made to previous lessons. The "On the Edge" unit attempts to promote literary understanding and appreciation by offering suggestions to teachers in the reading for comprehension and developing reading and thinking skills sections that focus on (a) literary elements such as plot, setting, and theme; (b) forms of literature such as poetry, mysteries, and science fiction/fantasy; and (c) elements of style such as metaphor and simile.

Survival as Coping With Conflict Situations

We compared the "On the Edge" unit with a unit entitled "Survival Tales: A Focus Unit for Grades Five and Six" in Focus Units in Literature: A Handbook for Elementary School Teachers by Joy F. Moss, published by the National Council of Teachers of English (1984). In contrast to the basal series, this handbook is written as a resource for teachers and is a collection of sample literature-based thematic units.

Although many learning experiences in the units would promote development of reading skills and comprehension, each unit's primary emphasis is on promoting understanding and appreciation of literature. The reading selections were chosen as illustrations of the survival theme of examining how the main characters struggled to cope with conflict situations independent of adult assistance or authority.

Each unit in the book contains goals and objectives, group story sessions, comparing stories and developing concepts, independent reading, creative writing, and creative expression. The goals and objectives are designed to fit the learning needs of the students, in terms of the nature of the curriculum, and the instructional goals of the teacher. For example, during the story sessions, the teacher reads aloud one or more books, asks questions, and leads a discussion. Students are asked to respond to questions designed to probe their responses to text. Next, books are compared for common patterns and characteristics. Each new story is discussed in terms of those read previously. Eight questions are used to guide the comparative study of books promoting the discovery of recurring patterns, important relationships, and distinguishing characteristics. These eight guiding questions include: (1) how would you categorize (historical fiction, contemporary realism, fantasy, wilderness survival, or natural disaster survival) this survival tale? (2) what do you notice about the way this story is told? (3) what signs of growth or change in the character(s) did you notice? (4) what role does the setting play in the development of plot and characters? (5) what is the nature of the survival in this story? (6) what qualities of the main character(s) are critical for coping with conditions or events which threaten survival? (7) what is the central theme? and (8) compare this story with other survival tales. These questions are designed to assist students in the formation of concepts which would help them unify these various books into a cohesive structure.

Independent reading is provided to meet diverse reading levels, develop aesthetic appreciation of literature, and expand reading interests. These periods are intended to show students that reading is valued, as they are encouraged to share their relevant personal reading experiences during group discussions and to integrate these experiences into their writing.

Basic Contrasts

Each unit treats the theme of survival differently. The first uses it to group a series of experiences together, and the second uses it to develop the theme through the learning experiences. Also, the nature and organization of the learning experiences in the two units contrast in many ways. The first unit's activities are loosely connected and focused more on developing comprehension of text, while the second unit's activities are cumulative and used as a vehicle to expand literary knowledge as well as develop critical/aesthetic response.

The Potential of the Two Survival Units

We examined the coherence of the units to appraise their potential for (a) developing the survival theme in a meaningful way and (b) creating connected experiences designed to engage students in developing connected understandings leading to greater understanding and appreciation of the literature selections.

Criterion 1: Development of a Meaningful Theme

One aspect of coherence that is important in a literature-based thematic unit is the extent to which the theme is developed and used to enhance and support students in constructing literary understanding and appreciation. A theme is a global meaning which unites all the activities in the unit not just the topic of the stories. Usually, a theme reflects certain values, or aspects of society, or particular human behaviors. Using this definition, a theme is not the same as a topic. Curriculum can be organized either by topic and themes, but a theme reflects a big idea, developing sets of concepts and relationships among concepts to form networks of ideas. We

looked at whether the grouping of literature achieved merely a topical commonality (e.g., all literary selections have something to do with the topic of survival), or whether the grouping and its treatment (e.g., activities and assignments throughout the unit) worked toward supporting students in developing ideas about the theme. A theme that unites literary selections based on topical commonality has less potential for supporting students in developing rich understandings than one that develops global meaning by helping students make connections among a set of concepts and relationships (Eichinger & Roth, 1991).

"On the Edge" unit. The teacher's edition for the "On the Edge" unit initially states the theme as people being on the edge of danger as a form of adventure. The three subsections that focus on different aspects of the theme include (a) selections about people facing natural disaster, (b) selections about people using their wits in the face of danger to solve a mystery or a puzzle, and (c) selections about time-travel adventure. However, this theme is not developed throughout the unit. Not only is there a lack of clarity regarding how the three subsections relate to the overall theme, readers are not encouraged to use the theme to enhance and support the development of literary understanding or appreciation. For instance, the only time the teacher is directed to develop the overall theme of adventure as suspense and danger is in the closing lesson of the unit. Here, the student is to be reminded that the selections they have read are about different types of adventures that people can have and are asked questions that probe for survival elements. The teacher's edition then suggests that the teacher read selections from the five pieces of previously read material, asking the students to explain what was in the adventure stories that kept them on the edge. Ways in which events in the selections may or may not generate feelings of suspense in readers are not clearly elicited. Again, this lack of coherence is a missed opportunity to foster appreciation of how human experience is depicted in literature. Lastly, the students are referred to the beginning of the unit and are

instructed to add any new ideas learned by reading the selections from the unit. Asking students to return to their original ideas about adventure has the potential to foster student reflection about their own understanding, provide a concrete means for them to see how they have extended their understanding, and allow for networking of ideas. However, the unit lacks coherence because the connections based on the theme are weak and underdeveloped.

In summary, the theme of being on the edge of danger is not made explicit until the end of the unit and then only mentioned. Given the lack of explicit connections between the theme and the three subsections, the "On the Edge" unit provides only topical connection and does not provide occasions for students to develop connected ideas about the theme. Therefore, it does not meet criterion 1 regarding the development of a meaningful theme.

"Survival Tales" Focus Unit. In contrast to the "On The Edge" unit, the "Survival Tales" Focus Unit developed a clear set of ideas about the theme of survival: examining how the main characters struggled to cope with conflict situations independent of adult assistance and authority. The theme is introduced and appears throughout the units' book selections. Learning experiences are designed to help students construct connections among the reading selections through the use of the eight guiding questions (see page 6). Both stories read during group story sessions and all independent reading selections are explicitly about survival and investigate ideas related to the theme of how the main characters struggle to cope with conflict situations independent of adult assistance and authority. By exploring these issues related to the theme, students are encouraged to focus on a particular networking of ideas pertaining to survival, instead of the selections just being topically grouped together because they are adventures of one kind or another.

After reading their books, the students can explore issues related to the theme of survival by participating in discussions. They read and listen to various survival

stories, and write their own survival tale. These reading selections were chosen because the heroines and heroes in the survival tales portray independence, draw from inner resources, and learn about themselves and others in their struggle to survive and overcome conflicts. Studying the intertwining of the theme throughout the various readings should enhance the students' literary understandings. For example, they are provided with occasions to analyze how the characters' actions, thoughts, and decisions relate to their survival across the selections. They also have opportunities to examine the interrelations among characters, settings, and conflicts. In addition, the students have opportunities to use newly-acquired knowledge about literature to new situations--the creation of their own survival tales.

Thus, the "Survival Tales" Focus Unit provides opportunities for students to construct a critical response to the theme as they judge, question, or react to the language, style, or characterization. They have an opportunity to examine a consistent network of ideas about the theme of survival in multiple ways over time.

Summary. Because the "Survival Tales" Focus Unit theme is developed throughout the reading selections, the discussions, and the writing activities, students are more likely to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of the literature than students who participate in the "On the Edge" basal unit whose theme is not developed as coherently. The loose topical grouping does not make use of the survival theme's potential for enhancing meaning construction and response to the selections.

Criterion 2: Development of Connections

A second aspect of coherence that is important in a literature-based thematic unit is the extent to which the theme is used to foster connected understandings through connected experiences. We examined ways in which connections among personal, social, and academic/metacognitive knowledge are supported through meaningful exploration of a theme. We also examined ways in which the four

language modes--reading, writing, speaking, and listening--are integrated to embody connected experiences across the units.

Connections among three kinds of knowledge. Enhancing students' understanding and appreciation of literature requires developing personal, social, and academic/metacognitive knowledge. Developing personal knowledge includes drawing on affective response such as causing students to reflect on their own values and ideals or to realize that other people experience fear, joy, and sorrow. According to Probst (1990), this personal knowledge has the potential of yielding insight into self by helping readers understand how their experiences may be similar to or different from those described in the text. Social knowledge also helps students make sense of the human experience and understand one another more clearly. This type of knowledge provides a message about life, values, and society such as helping students understand, appreciate, and celebrate ways in which families or communities are different. Social knowledge helps readers identify with the character(s), deal with emotions, and better understand themselves. Academic/metacognitive knowledge helps the student understand the subject matter the sense-making process and ties these two components together with the literary content. Understanding and using the text, story structure, genre, and literary techniques are part of this academic knowledge.

While learners construct knowledge as part of any experience, the strength of a coherent unit is that it promotes the building of integrated schemata as opposed to isolated concepts that may or may not be connected in meaningful ways. Connectedness contributes to the organization and accessibility of knowledge. Constructing clear connections helps students to clarify their understandings. Understanding and seeing the significance of these relationships is the essence of conceptual understanding. Using these three types of interconnected knowledge to interpret text is likely to enhance students' understanding and appreciation of

literature in ways that enable them to reflect on and make explicit their response to literature.

"On the Edge" Unit. In developing personal knowledge, reflection about oneself brings about a greater understanding of the individual and one's relationship to text. This aspect is weak in the "On the Edge" unit because the activities are not designed to get the student to think about this type of knowledge or how it may help them interpret text. The unit opener begins with a workbook page requiring students to fill in a concept map with words that describe being "on the edge" and then using these words students are to write a short story about being on the edge of danger. Students are asked to fill out other workbook pages that assess their personal knowledge (about tornadoes, courage, and science tricks and experiments). These three assignments are part of the K-W-L strategy for reading comprehension. As the students start a unit, they complete two sections: what they already Know about a topic and What they want to learn about it. At the end of the unit, the students fill out a third section where they describe what they Learned about the topic. Even though the K-W-L strategy is useful because it encourages students to read with a purpose, the unit still assesses personal knowledge based on topics rather than promotes development of connections between insights about self and the theme of survival. There is no opportunity to reflect on their knowledge and its connection to the selections.

In the "On the Edge" unit, the disconnected lessons do not provide enough time for students to develop social knowledge that would enhance their understanding and appreciation of the survival selections. For example, one of the writing assignments that could extend their social knowledge requires students to prepare questions for an interview with a person who has survived a dangerous situation. This assignment has the potential to help students develop empathy for these survivors and to use this empathy to appreciate characters in the unit selections. Unfortunately, there is no

follow-up discussion on what the students learned when interviewing the survivors. Providing time for the students to discuss and share what they learned from their interview about survival and connect it to the texts they are reading could enhance their social knowledge and their understanding of how that knowledge can be used to interpret and appreciate text.

The "On the Edge" unit focused mainly on academic/metacognitive knowledge, rather than on personal or social knowledge, and emphasized teaching vocabulary and reading comprehension. However, literary elements and forms of literature are discussed on three occasions and elements of style are discussed on two occasions. For instance, theme is defined as an important idea the author of the story wants to leave with his or her readers. The students are then asked to discuss a two-paragraph passage related to honesty and decide what the theme is. Next, they are expected to read a one-paragraph passage about piano lessons and are presented with three theme choices: (1) grades are not important, (2) if you want to do well, you must work hard, and (3) it is a waste of time to learn to play an instrument. The students are to choose the "correct answer." Following this, the students get to read the main reading selection, "The Big Wave," and discuss what they think is the most important idea. They also have opportunities to discuss other themes of stories, write an ending to a story after discussing its theme, and fill out a workbook page on the theme. This treatment of theme could send a conflicting message because in one activity theme is represented as one correct answer but in other activities students are told that there is no one way to state the theme of a story.

Not only are the three types of knowledge underrepresented, the connections between the lessons are disjointed and sometimes appear at random. The lessons are taught in relative isolation from one another with little or no reference made to previous lessons. Even though there is a good chronological representation from historical fiction to contemporary works, the genres have few characteristics in

common and do not lend themselves to comparison and contrast in terms of understanding the theme. Finally, there does not seem to be any benefit to the order of the selections. For example, the students read "Night of the Twister," a fictional natural disaster story before they read "Warning: Tornadoes on the Way," an informational text. Perhaps it would be more constructive for students to read an informational article about tornadoes to understand and develop their background knowledge before reading a fictional tale. In this way, reading the different texts would be cumulative and complementary activities and help students see ways in which personal knowledge can be used to enhance their understanding and enjoyment of the text.

"Survival Tales" Focus Unit. Students participating in the "Survival Tales" Focus Unit are submerged in investigating a strong survival theme rather than just a topic. They would be more likely to develop personal knowledge by reflecting on their own values about fear or courage compared to students who use the "On the Edge" basal unit because ideas about the survival theme are made explicit through discourse, writing, and reading. For example, while discussing what qualities Mafatu, the main character in Call It Courage (Sperry, 1940), possessed that were critical for coping with conditions or events that threatened his survival, students could compare their own understanding of what it meant to overcome fear to the way Mafatu faced his fear of the sea.

Developing social knowledge involves reflection tied to socializing and brings about a greater understanding of others in relation to society. The "Survival Tales" Focus Unit would likely promote strong networking of ideas pertaining to social knowledge. The culminating activity of creating an original survival story provides the students with an opportunity to develop knowledge of others as the students empathize with the various characters who handle conflict and survive adversarial conditions and use that knowledge to develop their own characters and contexts to

play out the survival theme. Moreover, listening to Call It Courage would give students a chance to reflect on courage and how it is valued in a different society.

The "Survival Tales" Focus Unit provides an opportunity for students to develop understandings of academic/metacognitive knowledge as they use literary elements to respond to and make sense of text. For example, using the eight questions as a guide would focus discourse on and potentially increase the students' knowledge about story elements (setting, plot, main character(s), and theme). During discussions, listening to and comparing the different survival tales would likely develop students' knowledge of text as they make connections between books, observe common patterns, and deepen their understanding of the story elements. Again, writing their own survival tale would likely promote academic/metacognitive knowledge by having students use what they have learned--about structure and content of survival tales, genres, literary techniques and patterns, and basic plots of selections previously read.

In sum, the "Survival Tales" Focus Unit allows for multiple opportunities for students to enrich their own lives and become more reflective through the development and use of personal, social, and academic/metacognitive knowledge. Thus, exploration of issues related to the theme would likely promote networking of ideas related to building the three types of knowledge. This has the potential for deepening understanding and appreciation of survival tales for the students.

Connected experiences among four language modes. A second way to promote connected understandings in a literature-based thematic unit is through integrating the four language modes to foster connected experiences that are cumulative and complementary. Students learn by talking about what they read and write. Watson (1989) states that students should be provided reading and writing experiences, as well as written and oral ones, that are connected in a meaningful setting. In classrooms with a literature-based perspective, students make personal connections

to meaning through reading and writing (Watson, 1989). According to Wagner (1985) integrating the language arts means providing learning situations in which reading, writing, listening, and speaking are developed together for real purposes and real audiences. This discussion examines integration for the purpose of (a) helping students understand the role of literature in their literacy development, (b) providing multiple contexts in which students use the four language modes, and (c) providing occasions for them to use the three kinds of knowledge and their understanding of the theme to understand and appreciate literature.

"On the Edge" unit. The Holt basal reader states that integration is an important component of the series. However, this does not appear to be the case when the writing activities are examined carefully for their connections to other language modes. Rarely are these language modes integrated within or across lessons.

The exception to this pattern is the integration of the writing process in the "Using Language" activity. Students write on the same topic over a period of three lessons and learn about writing subprocesses from prewriting to publishing. However, the writing topic is not connected well to the "On the Edge" theme. The other required writing assignments are also only vaguely related to the content. Examples include (a) writing a newspaper article that has nothing to do with the content of the previously read natural disaster story, (b) writing clues about a hidden object in their room after reading a mystery story, and (c) writing letters to a scientist after reading a science fiction/fantasy selection. Moreover, the optional writing assignments in the "On the Edge" unit appear to be included as fun activities. Some examples include writing a weather alert, some interview questions, and an editorial. None of these options specifically develops the understanding of the story content, the three kinds of knowledge, or the theme. Nor were the writing

assignments connected explicitly to the reading, speaking, and listening activities in the unit.

"Survival Tales" Focus Unit. In contrast, the three writing activities in the "Survival Tales" Focus Unit aim at helping students further their understanding of the survival theme by connecting the three types of knowledge through integration of the four language modes.

Students read books containing the survival theme, listen to the teacher read stories about survival during group story sessions, and talk about elements of survival in small group and large group discussions. Thus, all four language modes are interrelated, cumulative, and focused on promoting understanding of the theme. Moreover, the three writing activities (a book review, a record of common story elements, and an original survival tale) are designed to promote increased exploration of the survival theme and appreciation of ways in which the theme is developed. To understand and retain information, students need to connect the three kinds of knowledge to a larger context, which is encompassed in the exploration of the theme of survival.

Furthermore, the eight guiding questions used as a framework for studying survival tales (see page 6) are designed to encourage and support students' discourse for making connections across the independent reading selections. Examination of these questions is intended to provide students with occasions to develop a better understanding of literature through analysis of various elements and comparison across different stories. Reading, discussion, and analysis with a consistent focus are designed to enhance knowledge development across the unit.

Summary

The "Survival Tales" Focus Unit structure provides the students with multiple opportunities for interaction using the four language modes, giving them a chance to make personal, social, and academic/metacognitive connections. Students have

opportunities to respond to text in which authentic reading and writing tasks are experienced. Finally, meaningful questions probe students' responses so they can be examined, reconsidered, and revisited over time (Nystrand, 1990). The four language modes are used for focused examination of a theme over time, rather than included as "fun" or "neat" activities.

A Coherent Literature-Based Thematic Unit in Action

The second author had the opportunity to use the "Survival Tales" Focus Unit as a resource in teaching a literature-based thematic unit in her third/fourth-grade classroom in the fall of 1990. We have selected excerpts from her written reflections on the unit to illustrate ways in which the potential of the "Survival Tales" Focus Unit became realized.

Power of the Survival Theme

Informal discussions with the students revealed their interest in adventure stories, especially when characters faced danger. The theme of survival seemed to fit with this type of story which contained elements of adventure, conflict, and danger. The theme of survival interested the students and touched a personal chord of excitement and suspense. The objective was to provide an opportunity for students to investigate issues about survival, to question, reflect, and grow in their understandings of the values related to courage, fear, and what it means to survive.

Using a survival theme provided opportunities for students to construct new understandings that went beyond their personal experiences. Students explored both physical and mental survival to extend their own personal meanings of survival derived from personal experience. These two types of survival especially surfaced during discussions on Call It Courage. The following was noted in a journal entry:

> The students quickly learned what it meant for Mafatu, the main character, to physically survive against a hurricane, octopus, shark, and cannibals. There was also discussion on how Mafatu overcame his mental fear of the sea. They compared and contrasted Mafatu's survival experiences with their main characters from their independent

> reading selections as they overcame conflict to survive. For instance, the boys in Avalanche survived physically in the snow alone and conquered their fears just as Mafatu overcame his physical obstacles and mental fear of the sea alone. Overall, the students were highly engaged in and enthusiastic about survival as a topic of investigation. (9-19-90)

Connections Among Three Kinds of Knowledge

The students used the three kinds of knowledge interactively to understand and appreciate the theme of survival. As they developed personal knowledge, they acknowledged that they would have been afraid of the water had their mother died from exposure to the sea. The following is from a journal entry:

> The description of how Mafatu's mother fought to survive the strong current, the broken outrigger, sharks, coldness, which eventually led to her death stimulated a lively discussion on survival and death, and created deeper understandings of why Mafatu was afraid of the sea. (9-24-90)

Development of social knowledge was fostered by having the students empathize with Mafatu in Call It Courage. The objective was for the students to increase their understandings about courage by thinking about Mafatu's culture where people had to be fearless to physically survive the harsh conditions. Another objective was for the students to understand why Mafatu was personally afraid of the water and how courage helped him overcome his fear. Small group and whole group discussions were occasions for these understandings to develop. For example, as noted in another journal entry, students grew to understand other peoples' motives:

> The students felt strongly about the boys of the tribe treating Mafatu unfairly. They commented on how the boys shamed and ostracized Mafatu for his cowardliness. The students discussed how people often have mental conflicts to overcome. The discussion focused on why Mafatu had to prove his courage to himself, to the other boys, and especially to his father by conquering his fear of the sea. The students identified with Mafatu and admired him for overcoming his fear of the sea. They seemed to understand that people have to face their fears to conquer them. (10-16-90)

Academic/metacognitive knowledge developed throughout the unit as students listened, read, spoke, and wrote about the survival theme. For instance, as noted in a

journal entry, the students had no difficulty using their knowledge to create stories that contained rich literary elements with survival themes:

> Many of their stories involved people physically surviving tornadoes, blizzard, rapids while other students wrote about characters in conflict with others such as bullies, kidnappers, and hunters. Their stories contained survival elements such as overcoming fear, being adaptable, and solving problems of survival alone. (10-15-90)

Connected Understandings Among Four Language Modes

The four language modes of reading, writing, speaking, and listening were complementary, cumulative, and connected during the survival unit through a variety of activities. One way that was especially effective was the creation of literature response logs for the students' independent reading selections. The purpose for using the literature response logs was to monitor student growth and assess student understanding of the survival theme. With insights gleaned from whole group discussions, small group discussions, writing, independent reading and creative expression the students were ready to respond in their literature logs. For example, the question "What does survival mean to you?" got the following student responses:

> "To be able to live to see the next day."
> "To live through danger."
> "To live through an accident."
> "When someone lives through a tornado, or a blizzard, or gets stuck on an island."
> "It means you live."
> "To not die; to live."
> "To still be alive after something bad has happened."
> "It means to live from dangerous things and animals."

These students articulated their understanding of survival to include struggling to overcome conflict and danger through inner strength and physical endurance.

When asked "How does the setting in your survival story contribute to the plot?" some responses included:

> "Because it was a blizzard and it was an exciting adventure story."
> "My story is about animals who survive the hunting season by hiding in trees and caves, and by running away from hunters."

"My story Sirens describes a family surviving a tornado by huddling under a table in the basement."
"My main character survives the cold in the wilderness by finding food and making friends with the animals."
"The main character in my story uses the wood on the island to make a house and a fence so she can survive the wild dog pack."
"I have a character who survives living on a desert island by befriending a dog so he isn't lonely."

In each of these stories, the students were able to use their settings as a way to advance the reader's understandings about the theme. Some of their stories included overcoming mental barriers while others had characters who overcame physical obstacles.

Coherence Supports Understanding and Appreciation

These reflections provide a glimpse into ways in which coherence helped this thematic unit succeed. By exploring ideas about survival (not just topically grouping stories), the theme became a powerful tool for promoting personal, social, and academic/metacognitive knowledge that students used to understand and appreciate the literary selections. By using the survival theme to explore and develop the three kinds of knowledge, connections among them were fostered. The survival theme also proved to be a natural and authentic way to integrate the use of the four language modes as students collaborated to explore the theme in literary selections, and then used their newly constructed knowledge to create their own survival stories. Judging by their discussions, their response logs, and their written stories, the Focus Unit proved to be a valuable resource for creating a successful thematic literature-based unit that helped students understand and appreciate literature.

Implications for Selecting and Using Curriculum Resources

Teachers need to choose resources for literature-based thematic units well and consider seriously the power of the theme for developing literary understanding and appreciation. It is easy to get swept away by the appeal of a theme on the basis of student interest alone, and neglect to investigate the extent to which the theme can

be developed to promote knowledge, skills, and dispositions to understand and appreciate literature as an important and worthwhile goal for language arts instruction. Networking ideas around a strong theme and developing connected understandings through connected experiences is essential in creating coherent units.

The Focus Unit is a structure that develops the survival theme meaningfully and uses the theme to support knowledge construction and connections. In addition, it is a good example of creating learning experiences that connect the four language modes and that provide ways for students to use what they have learned in one activity to complete the next in a cumulative fashion. Although the "On the Edge" unit holds less potential as a resource than the "Survival Tales" Focus Unit, teachers could bring coherence to the unit by studying the structure and learning activities provided in the Focus Unit. For example, reading of particular selections could be re-ordered to maximize the logical sequence in which students would study pieces. Moreover, a teacher could develop with her students a set of ideas related to the "On the Edge" survival theme (much like the first author did with her students as they explored physical and mental survival) by providing occasions for students to discuss, explore and develop their responses to the theme as an explicit issue. In addition, a teacher could develop a set of framing questions that students use throughout the unit. These questions could help them explore the unit's theme as well as help them develop personal, social, and academic/metacognitive knowledge and use knowledge in a cumulative fashion over time to interpret and appreciate text. These suggestions are patterned after the Focus Unit structure but also reflect the kinds of revisions teachers already make naturally as they use resources in their classrooms.

Curriculum materials and teacher resource handbooks only hold potential for effective instruction and meaningful learning (Ben-Peretz, 1990, Stodolsky, 1989). It

is up to teachers in classrooms to use the materials wisely to maximize their potential. The criteria developed here for creating coherent literature-based thematic units--developing a meaningful theme, and developing connected understandings through connected experiences--are a framework teachers can use to evaluate materials and resource guides for their potential. They are also frameworks teachers can use for contributing their own ideas and extending the ideas that are in resources. Our faith must go into the people who use the materials, since they are the ones who make curriculum come alive in the classroom.

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Appendix

Framing Questions

to enable teachers to implement a reasonably good program? If not, what else is needed?

a. Do the materials provide the teacher with specific information about students' prior knowledge (or ways to determine prior knowledge) and likely responses to instruction, questions, activities, and assignments? Does the teachers manual provide guidance about ways to elaborate or follow up on text material to develop understanding?

b. To what extent does the teachers manual give guidance concerning kinds of sustained teacher-student discourse surrounding assignments and activities?

c. What guidance is given to teachers regarding how to structure activities and scaffold student progress during assignment completion, and how to provide feedback following completion?

d. What kind of guidance is given to the teacher about grading or giving credit to participating in classroom discourse, work on assignments, performance on tests, or other evaluation techniques?

e. Are suggested materials accessible to the teacher?

4. What content and pedagogical knowledge is required for the teacher to use this curriculum effectively?

3/14/89

Phase II Study 2: Curriculum Materials Analysis
Framing Questions

A. GOALS

1. Are selective, clear, specific goals stated in terms of student outcomes? Are any important goals omitted? As a set, are the goals appropriate to students' learning needs?

2. Do goals include fostering conceptual understanding and higher order applications of content?

3. To what extent does attainment of knowledge goals imply learning networks of knowledge structured around key ideas in addition to the learning of facts, concepts, and principles or generalizations?

4. What are the relationships between and among conceptual (propositional), procedural, and conditional knowledge goals?

5. To what extent do the knowledge goals address the strategic and metacognitive aspects of processing the knowledge for meaning, organizing it for remembering, and accessing it for application?

6. What attitude and dispositional goals are included?

7. Are cooperative learning goals part of the curriculum?

8. Do the stated goals clearly drive the curriculum (content, activities, assignments, evaluation)? Or does it appear that the goals are just lists of attractive features being claimed for the curriculum or post facto rationalizations for decisions made on some other basis?

B. CONTENT SELECTION

1. Given the goals of the curriculum, is the selection of the content coherent and appropriate? Is there coherence across units and grade levels? (Note: all questions in this section should be answered with the goals in mind.)

2. What is communicated about the nature of the discipline from which the school subject originated?

   a. How does content selection represent the substance and nature of the discipline?

   b. Is content selection faithful to the discipline from which the content is drawn?

c. What does the relationship among conceptual (propositional), conditional, and procedural knowledge communicate about the nature of the discipline?

3. To what extent were life applications used as a criterion for content selection and treatment? For example, in social studies, is learning how the world works and how it got to be that way emphasized?

4. What prior student knowledge is assumed? Are assumptions justified? Where appropriate, does the content selection address likely student misconceptions?

5. Does content selection reflect consideration for student interests, attitudes, dispositions to learn?

6. Are there any provisions for student diversity (culture, gender, race, ethnicity)?

C. CONTENT ORGANIZATION AND SEQUENCING

1. Given the goals of the curriculum, is the organization of the content coherent and appropriate? Is there coherence across units and grade levels? (Note: All questions in this section should be answered with goals kept in mind.)

2. To what extent is the content organized in networks of information structured in ways to explicate key ideas, major themes, principles, generalizations?

3. What is communicated about the nature of the discipline from which the school subject originates?

   a. How does content organization represent the substance and nature of the discipline?

   b. Is content organization faithful to the discipline from which the content is drawn?

   c. What does the relationship among conceptual (propositional), conditional, and procedural knowledge communicate about the nature of the discipline?

4. How is content sequenced, and what is the rationale for sequencing? For example, is a linear or hierarchical sequence imposed on the content so that students move from isolated and lower level aspects toward more integrated and higher level aspects? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the chosen sequencing compared to other choices that might have been made?

5. If the content is spiralled, are strands treated in sufficient depth, and in a non-repetitious manner?

D. CONTENT EXPLICATION IN THE TEXT

1. Is topic treatment appropriate?

   a. Is content presentation clear?

   b. If content is simplified for young students, does it retain validity?

   c. How successfully is the content explicated in relation to students' prior knowledge, experience, and interest? Are assumptions accurate?

   d. When appropriate, is there an emphasis on surfacing, challenging, and correcting student misconceptions?

2. Is the content treated with sufficient depth to promote conceptual understanding of key ideas?

3. Is the text structured around key ideas?

   a. Is there alignment between themes/key ideas used to introduce the material, the content and organization of the main body of material, and the points focused on in summaries and review questions at the end?

   b. Are text-structuring devices and formatting used to call attention to key ideas?

   c. Where relevant, are links between sections and units made explicit to students?

4. Are effective representations (e.g., examples, analogies, diagrams, pictures, overheads, photos, maps) used to help students relate content to current knowledge and experience?

   a. When appropriate, are concepts represented in multiple ways?

   b. Are representations likely to hold student interest or stimulate interest in the content?

   c. Are representations likely to foster higher level thinking about the content?

   d. Do representations provide for individual differences?

5. When pictures, diagrams, photos, etc. are used, are they likely to promote understanding of key ideas, or have they been inserted for other

reasons? Are they clear and helpful, or likely to be misleading or difficult to interpret?

6. Are adjunct questions inserted before, during, or after the text? Are they designed to promote: memorizing; recognition of key ideas; higher order thinking; diverse responses to materials; raising more questions; application?

7. When skills are included (e.g., map skills), are they used to extend understanding of the content or just added on? To what extent is skills instruction embedded within holistic application opportunities rather than isolated as practice of individual skills?

8. To what extent are skills taught as strategies, with emphasis not only on the skill itself but on developing relevant conditional knowledge (when and why the skill would be used) and on the metacognitive aspects of its strategic application?

B. TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS AND CLASSROOM DISCOURSE

1. What forms of teacher-student and student-student discourse are called for in the recommended activities, and by whom are they to be initiated? To what extent does the recommended discourse focus on a small number of topics, wide participation by many students, questions calling for higher order processing of the content?

2. What are the purposes of the recommended forms of discourse?

   a. To what extent is clarification and justification of ideas, critical and creative thinking, reflective thinking, or problem solving promoted through discourse?

   b. To what extent do students get opportunities to explore/explain new concepts and defend their thinking during classroom discourse? What is the nature of those opportunities?

3. Who or what stands out as the authority for knowing? Is the text to be taken as the authoritative and complete curriculum or as a starting place or outline for which the discourse is intended to elaborate and extend it? Are student explanations/ideas and everyday examples elicited?

4. Do recommended activities include opportunities for students to interact with each other (not just the teacher) in discussions, debates, cooperative learning activities, etc.?

F. ACTIVITIES AND ASSIGNMENTS

1. As a set, do the activities and assignments provide students with a variety of activities and opportunities for exploring and communicating their understanding of the content?

   a. Is there an appropriate mixture of forms and cognitive, affective, and/or aesthetic levels of activities?

   b. To what extent do they call for students to integrate ideas or engage in critical and creative thinking, problem-solving, inquiry, decision making, or higher order applications vs. recall of facts & definitions or busy work?

2. As a set, do the activities and assignments amount to a sensible program of appropriately scaffolded progress toward stated goals?

3. What are examples of particularly good activities and assignments, and what makes them good (relevant to accomplishment of major goals, student interest, foster higher level thinking, feasibility and cost effectiveness, likeliness to promote integration and life application of key ideas, etc.)?

   a. Are certain activities or assignments missing that would have added substantially to the value of the unit?

   b. Are certain activities or assignments sound in conception but flawed in design (e.g., vagueness or confusing instruction, invalid assumptions about students' prior knowledge, infeasibility, etc.)?

   c. Are certain activities or assignments fundamentally unsound in conception (e.g., lack relevance, pointless busy work)?

4. To what extent are assignments and activities linked to understanding and application of the content being taught?

   a. Are these linkages to be made explicit to the students to encourage them to engage in the activities strategically (i.e., with metacognitive awareness of goals and strategies)? Are they framed with teacher or student questions that will promote development?

   b. Where appropriate, do they elicit, challenge, and correct misconceptions?

   c. Do students have adequate knowledge and skill to complete the activities and assignments?

5. When activities or assignments involve integration with other subject areas, what advantages and disadvantages does such integration entail?

6. To what extent do activities and assignments call for students to write beyond the level of a single phrase or sentence? To what extent do the chosen forms engage students in higher order thinking?

G. ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

1. Do the recommended evaluation procedures constitute an ongoing attempt to determine what students are coming to know and to provide for diagnosis and remediation?

2. What do evaluation items suggest constitute mastery? To what extent do evaluation items call for application vs. recall?

   a. To what extent are multiple approaches used to assess genuine understanding?

   b. Are there attempts to assess accomplishment of attitudinal or dispositional goals?

   c. Are there attempts to assess metacognitive goals?

   d. Where relevant, is conceptual change assessed?

   e. Are students encouraged to engage in assessment of their own understanding/skill?

3. What are some particularly good assessment items, and what makes them good?

4. What are some flaws that limit the usefulness of certain assessment items (e.g., more than one answer is correct; extended production form, but still asking for factual recall, etc.).

H. DIRECTIONS TO THE TEACHER

1. Do suggestions to the teacher flow from a coherent and manageable model of teaching and learning the subject matter? If so, to what extent does the model foster higher order thinking?

2. To what extent does the curriculum come with adequate rationale, scope and sequence chart, introductory section that provide clear and sufficiently detailed information about what the program is designed to accomplish and how it has been designed to do so?

3. Does the combination of student text, advice and resources in teachers manual, and additional materials constitute a total package sufficient